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# Landscape of Grief: Place-Making in Thailand's Deep South

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# *Landscape of Grief: Place-Making in Thailand's Deep South*

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*Muhammad Arafat*

## **Abstract:**

Places are social constructs. They become individuated and significant when imbued with meaning through people's lived experience, usage, and imagery. This paper discusses the construction of *Patanian places* in Thailand's Deep South, a region consisting of the provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala, where the Malays constitute the ethnic majority. Using the Krisek Mosque, the Tomb of Sultan Ismail Shah, and the former home of Haji Sulong as examples, the paper shows how Patanian Malay narratives about these places illustrate their sorrow about the demise of the historical Malay kingdom of Patani and their community's strained political relationship with the Thai state and nation. Viewed collectively, these places constitute a landscape of grief for the Patanian Malays.

**Keywords:** Place; Landscape; Patani; Southern Thailand; Malays

# *Landscape of Grief: Place-Making in Thailand's Deep South*

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*Muhammad Arafat*

*The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.*

Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

## **Introduction**

The conflict in Thailand's Deep South, which surfaced in January 2004, has claimed almost 7,000 lives while many more have sustained injuries (Dusdao Lertpipat & Srisompob Jitpomsri 2016). The geography of the Deep South, comprising the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala, corresponds to the political domain of the Kingdom of Patani that was annexed by the Siamese/Thai Kingdom in the late eighteenth century. The term *Deep South* has been employed by various scholars to connote both the region's location in the southernmost part of the country and its unique political environment, which has seen several episodes of protracted conflict. In my conversations with many Deep South Malays since I began visiting the area in 2002, I have observed that many of them have a strong desire for the recognition of their Malay-Muslim ethno-religious identity, which harks back to their community's self-perceived unity under the rule of the rajas of Patani. For this reason, I shall now refer to them as Patanians. However, it is important to acknowledge that their desire to be recognized as Malay-Muslims (PM: *oghe nayu* or *oghe taning*)<sup>1</sup> should not be conflated with support for or active participation in Patanian separatism.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, PM = Patani Malay; Th = Thai

This paper is about historic places and place-making among the Patanians of Thailand's Deep South. I began conducting field research in the Deep South in 2002. The material presented here is based on data that has been gathered from a mix of planned interviews and impromptu conversations about historic sites. Throughout this time, I have encountered many Patanians who are conscious of the existence and the names of various historic sites (PM: *tempat sejarah*) in their midst, but lack awareness of the events, circumstances, and people associated with these sites. In other words, they do not know much about the historical significance of these places. If there is a widespread sentiment among the Patanians that such places to be important – they would not apply the adjective *sejarah* [PM. historic] otherwise – why do they appear to lack the interest to educate themselves about the histories of these places? In this paper, I focus on three sites around Pattani: *Masjid Krisek* and *Makam Sultan Ismail Shah* located in the Krisek district as well as *Ban Haji Sulong* (Th: the home of Haji Sulong) in the town district (Th: *amphoe mueang*). These places take on a variety of functions and meanings in everyday life. Masjid Krisek is a mosque, a place of worship and a venue for religious instruction. Makam Sultan Ismail Shah is the tomb of a late ruler of the Kingdom of Patani while the home of Haji Sulong was until recently the dilapidated former residence of a prominent religious leader of the community. When viewed together these places form part of a landscape of grief for the Patanians, which indexes the community's sorrow about the demise of something that they associate with the historical Patanian society. I argue that many Patanians idealize the Kingdom of Patani as an era during which the community's social situation was more favorable than the one that it faces in contemporary Thai society. The landscape of grief in the Deep South, thus, captures a past that is central to Patanian collective consciousness, even as the community accept their membership of the Thai nation.

### **Place, landscape, community, history**

According to Thomas Gieryn (2000) there are three factors that are central in the constitution of place - geographic location, material form, and meaning and value. Gieryn (2000: 472), "places are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there." On the other hand, he describes *space* elegantly as "what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out." (Gieryn 2000: 465)

Places are social constructs. They are the results of people's lived experience, usage, and imagery. One might simply think of monuments such as war memorials to see this point. At other times, places emerge as they acquire meanings and significance from social activities. In an essay about Chittagong, William van Schendel (2015) shows that the town assumed various significances at different moments of its history namely as an Asian trading center in the seventeenth century, a colonial town in the early twentieth century, a vital port for communications between the two geographically separated parts of Pakistan in the mid-twentieth century, and has since developed into a Bangladeshi metropolis following its separation from Pakistan in 1971.

In the English language, landscape is commonly used to refer to the expanse of scenery that a person may view from a single location. In this regard, landscape refers to a "physical reality 'out there'." (Tappe & Pholsena 2013: 6) Landscape, however, is more than just a material spatial reality. (Cosgrove 2006; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Stewart & Strathern 2003; Tappe & Pholsena 2013; Trudeau 2006) As a type of place "landscapes have an unquestionably material presence, yet they come into being only at the moment of apprehension by an external observer, and thus have a complex poetics and politics." (Cosgrove 2006: 50) Consider the artistic genre of landscape painting. Although some of us might think that a good piece of landscape painting is a close reproduction of the space being observed, the artwork is more likely a presentation of the artist's perception of the view in front of him. In fact, the artist makes decisions regarding the material, media, and motifs to evoke or communicate an emotion. Thus, mental framing is central to landscape. In this essay, I retain the notion of vastness that is implied in the word's common usage by treating landscape as a satellite of places that are connected by a shared meaning and significance.

Various studies of the landscape concept have treated it as a socio-spatial process of place-making that intersects with notions of community, history, and belonging (Cosgrove 2006; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Stewart & Strathern 2003; Tappe & Pholsena 2013; Trudeau 2006). In a critical survey of the myriad uses of *community* in anthropology, John Clarke (2014) addresses the widespread tendency to link community to place. According to him, community may refer to people's place of origin, where they live, or a place that is characterized with a "distinctive type of social relations or way of life (agricultural, peasant, farming, sedentary, closed corporate, and

even affluent, privileged communities).” (Clarke 2014: 59) More importantly, notions of community may involve the politics of belonging both in terms of who rightfully belongs to a place and to whom the place belongs. In an article about a dispute regarding the Hmong ritual animal sacrifice at a slaughterhouse in Hugo, Minnesota, Daniel Trudeau (2006) discusses the use of land zoning rules to exclude minority cultural practices, and therefore, the minority community itself, from the social life of the town. He argues that landscape-making practices, such as land zoning rules and town plans, include some categories of people while excluding others whom the majority perceives to be undesirable elements within the community.

Efforts to define the boundaries of communities - between insiders and outsiders - frequently summon the past as a resource. Perhaps, this point is best exemplified by the diaspora phenomenon. Unlike other place-based communities, diasporas are not located within a contiguous space. The observer’s and perhaps the diasporas’ own notion of the ties shared by their members is based upon the place of origins of their ancestors. Thus, Indians who live in New York, London, Dubai, South Africa, Singapore, and so on, may have very different lifestyles and lived experiences, but might be thought to belong to the same community because of their ancestral roots in the Indian subcontinent. The use of the past as a resource for establishing social solidarity, of course, is by no means restricted to diasporas. Think about the building of historical monuments, the teaching of history in schools for nation-building or even the intergenerational transmission of folktales about community origins around the world. It is hardly doubtable that individuals, groups, and nations consider history to be a key factor in defining a community. The past, however, may generate a sense of loss - nostalgia - among members of a community. According to Cosgrove (2006: 56), “*nostalgia*, a pseudo-Greek neologism that combines the sense of bodily pain (*algia*) and returning home (*nostos*), was coined as a quasi-medical condition” in the late eighteenth century. This point is poignant in the case of the Patanians. Why do the Patanians consider it important enough to know the existence of various historic sites amidst them even though, unlike professional historians, they seem disinterested in delving into the study of the histories of these places? Citing Svetlana Boym’s (2002) notion of *restorative nostalgia*, Cosgrove (2006: 57) wrote that the term “emphasizes the bittersweet pain of longing and loss (*algia*) and dwells upon ruins, on the patina of time and history, on uncanny silences and absences, and on dreams.” This notion of restorative nostalgia is instructive in our exploration of the contemporary Patanians’ motivations

for remembering historic places, especially in terms of mourning the loss of something that they value namely the recognition of their status as natives in the Deep South and the respect, rights, and privileges that come with that status.

### **Whose mosque?**

Anyone who intends to visit historic places in the Deep South will not encounter much difficulty when soliciting for suggestions from local Patanians today. If the visitor is willing to travel to any part of the Deep South, several sites are likely to be mentioned, including old mosques, cemeteries, and palaces. Masjid Krisek, which is located some 6.5 kilometers from the Pattani City Hall, is one of them.

Francis Bradley (2015) has remarked that Masjid Krisek is the first permanent mosque to have been built in Patani. Some Patanians whom I have met date the construction of this mosque to some 500 years ago. The temporal origin of Masjid Krisek, however, has been contested. Some sources claim that the mosque was built in the sixteenth century, while others assert that its construction took place more recently in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. (Chaiwat Satha-Anand 1993) Regardless of the lack of agreement over the actual date of the mosque's construction, Masjid Krisek's historical significance is recognized by both the Thai state and the Patanians. The mosque was conferred official status as a historic site by the Thai government in 1935. On 26 August 1983, an additional 4.2 acres of land around the mosque was declared to be part of the historic site by Thailand's Department of Fine Arts. (Chaiwat Satha-Anand 1993) In Thailand, structures are typically pronounced as historic sites because of their age, design, and significance to the nation's history. Repair works, modifications, or actions that might change or damage historic sites are considered illegal unless a proposal has been made to and approved by the Director General of the Department of Fine Arts (Chaiwat Satha-Anand 1993).

The importance of Masjid Krisek to the Patanians can be observed from its frequent use and visit by members of the community. One difference between Masjid Krisek and the other two sites to be discussed is that it is still used as a site for the performance of prayers and religious instruction. Masjid Krisek consistently attracts Muslims who wish to perform the five daily prayers



as a congregation. Its location along a major highway enhances its accessibility and has an imposing physical presence on commuters and passersby. It is not uncommon to see individuals or small groups of people offering prayers during any visit to the mosque. Further, I have observed that people, including school groups and Thai as well as international visitors, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, often stop by to take pictures of this iconic mosque. A quick search on the Internet will generate numerous photos of visitors to the mosque. During my recent visit in February 2017, I met a British traveler who was visiting the mosque with his friend, a resident of Pattani province. In short, Masjid Krisek's significance is partly owed to its continuing use as a venue for carrying out individual and congregational prayers as well as a place of interest for visitors to the Deep South.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand (1993) has argued that Masjid Krisek's importance extends beyond its age and function as a prayer venue. According to him, Masjid Krisek has been the space for the Patanians' identity struggle. Between 1987-90, Masjid Krisek became the venue of a few events that drew large numbers of Patanians who were upset by the Thai government's insensitive use of a myth about the mosque and the adjacent Lim Ko Niao Shrine as part of its tourism marketing campaign. Although various versions of the legend of Lim Ko Niao had existed for a long time, the government chose to promote the version, which claims that Lim Ko Niao had placed a curse on the mosque so that its construction could never be completed. According to this version, Lim Ko Niao travelled to Patani from China to persuade her brother, Lim Tho Khiem, who had converted to Islam to denounce his new faith and return to China (Chaiwat Satha-Anand 1993). Stricken by her failure, Lim Ko Niao took her own life by hanging at a nearby cashew tree. Masjid Krisek is said to have been struck by lightning each time the Patanians attempted to complete its construction because of a curse laid upon it by Lim Ko Niao.

Chaiwat (1993) has observed that the circulation of this version of the legend has never engendered much of a negative response from the Patanians who doubted its veracity. However, the government's use of it for tourism promotion was an entirely different matter. To the Patanians, it constitutes a political maneuver to insinuate the relative inferiority of their Islamic faith. Furthermore, the sanctions against the modification of officially recognized historic sites foreclosed any opportunity for them to attempt the completion of the mosque and prove the

legend's claim wrong. Consequently, the Patanians, many of whom believed that Masjid Krisek had, in fact, been damaged during various episodes of war between the Patanians and the invading Siamese forces from 1786-1838, organized several events to request the revocation of Masjid Krisek's status as a historic site. At other times, the conferment of historic status to a place may be viewed as an enhancement of its prestige. In this instance, however, Patanians viewed the status as a limitation of their ownership and control over the historic mosque. Put differently, Masjid Krisek had become a property of the Thai state and nation rather than theirs. This point was made clear when the Thai authorities arrested several leading organizers one of the events held at the mosque in 1990 and charged them for *lèse-majesté*.

The clashes between Patanian perpetrators and Thailand's security forces on 28 April 2004 highlight Masjid Krisek's significance to the Patanian Malay-Muslim identity further. On the morning of that day, bands of Patanian youths attacked officers at several security checkpoints around the Deep South. By the end of the day, over a hundred of the perpetrators had died in clashes with Thailand's security forces. The incident at Masjid Krisek specially attracted interest from both Thailand's authorities and the Patanians. During the event, a group of lightly armed youths retreated and sought refuge at Masjid Krisek after attacking a nearby security checkpoint. They were outnumbered by the security personnel who swiftly surrounded the historic mosque. A nine-hour standoff ensued following which some civilian witnesses claim that the security personnel bombarded the perpetrators with machine guns, grenades, and rockets before storming the mosque and killing the remaining survivors at point blank range. The actions of the security forces on that fateful day are still considered to be excessive by many Patanians today (McCargo 2008). This resulted in a further reduction of Patanian confidence and trust in the Thai state. Some Patanians believe that the youths had planned to die during the event. During my visit to Masjid Krisek in February 2017, an elderly man remarked that the youths' retreat to the mosque was a symbolic move. He alleged that the young men had known that meeting death at the hands of Thai soldiers in the historic mosque meant that they would evoke the sympathy of the Patanian community and thus be viewed as martyrs. Many Patanians echo the elderly man's view. While they do not think that the actions and deaths of the youth were necessary, they were clearly cognizant of the ethnic and religious significance of the incident. The Thai state and its armed forces had walked straight into the perpetrators' trap.

## **Phaya Inthira or Sultan Ismail Shah?**

We shall now turn our attention to the Patanian royal tombs located in Ban Pare. From Masjid Krisek, one simply has to travel about two kilometers eastwards on highway 42 before making a left turn to exit the highway. The road directional sign labels the most prominent royal tomb in Ban Pare as the *Phaya Inthira Cemetery*. To the Patanians, Phaya Inthira is known as Sultan Ismail Shah and his grave as *Kubo Barahom*<sup>2</sup>. According to a signboard located near the entrance to the cemetery, Sultan Ismail Shah reigned in Patani from 1500 to 1530. He is believed to be the first ruler of Patani to have converted to Islam. Accounts of his conversion are found in the *Hikayat Patani* (Teeuw & Wyatt 1970) and Ibrahim Syukri's (1985) *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*. It should be noted that most Patanians today have not read either of these texts. Some historically inclined Patanians claim that they have learnt about the circumstances of Sultan Ismail Shah's conversion from their elders thus reflecting the importance of collective memories to the historical consciousness of the Patanians.

It is said that the ruler had been taken so ill prior to his conversion and was not able to give audience to his council of ministers. Consequently, he issued a public call for anyone with the ability to treat his illness to come forward. His invitation was answered by Syeikh Said, an Islamic religious teacher from the Kingdom of Pasai, who was residing in Patani at that time. The ruler offered to make Syeikh Said his son-in-law if the latter was successful in curing his illness. Syeikh Said, however, was not interested. He requested that the ruler convert to Islam instead. The ruler agreed but went back on his word after he was cured. This situation repeated itself when he fell ill once more two years later. On the third occasion, Syeikh Said asserted that he would not treat the ruler again if the latter failed to carry out his promise even if the ruler were to punish him with the death penalty. This time, though, the ruler fulfilled his promise to Syeikh Said who then presided over the ruler's conversion to Islam and gave him the name Sultan Ismail Shah Zillullah Fil-Alam at the ruler's request. (Teeuw & Wyatt 1970) According to my Patanian interlocutors, Sultan

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<sup>2</sup> Barahom is likely to be a Patanian Malay inflection of the Arabic word *al-marhom*, which means one who is a recipient of God's mercy. This term is usually used as a suffix to persons who are deceased. In this case, barahom refers to the late Sultan Ismail Shah as a form of deference. The village where his grave is located is named Kampong Barahom.

Ismail Shah's family and his ministers followed suit. Patani, then, officially became an Islamic kingdom.

Cemeteries, in general, are important places that distinguish the Patanians' cultural difference from the rest of Thai society. Unlike other provinces in the country, the existence of the many cemeteries in the Deep South illustrates the Patanians' status as the majority in the region. As the burial of the dead is a religiously prescribed practice, Patanian cemeteries also assume a sacred character. Many Patanians believe that the state is less likely to intervene in these religious spaces to avoid provoking the community. This makes cemeteries fertile grounds to anchor Patanian collective memories and consciousness. It is not surprising, then, that visitors to the Deep South who are interested in Patanian history are often directed to several graves and cemeteries by their hosts. In January 2017, a seminar regarding *Batu Aceh*, a style of gravestone that is said to have originated from Aceh, Indonesia, was held in Pattani. Internet-published reports about the event have highlighted the Malayness of the graves and the prominence of the visits of participants to Muslim cemeteries around the province. Photographs of the visits, which can be found on Internet-based social media such as Facebook, show some of the participants dressed up in traditional Malay costume, complete with the *semutar* headgear and *kain samping* - a piece of textile that wraps the middle section of a man's body ("*Batu Aceh' Ditemui di Patani*" 2017). Sultan Ismail Shah's tomb was one of the graves that were visited.

The Patanians with whom I have discussed the issue of Patanian royalty have all said that their awareness of the royal tombs should not be interpreted as a desire for the return of the Kingdom of Patani. Ismail, a freelance builder in his fifties whom I have known since 2002, said, "Many of us do not revere these former rajas like the Thais revere their king. I do not even know if these Malay rajas were really kind to the commoners." Nevertheless, Ismail, like many other Patanians, asserts that the royal tombs are important to their community. He views them as physical and symbolic links to their community's history and a reflection of their Malay-Muslim cultural identity.

The Patanians' awareness of the existence of Patanian royal tombs amidst them is not a practice of commemorating the former rulers as leaders. I have yet to meet a single Patanian, who

express any admiration for Sultan Ismail Shah since I began researching about graves in the Deep South in 2004. While most of my interlocutors display some sort of deference for the Patanian monarchical institution, none of them spoke glowingly about the former rulers nor do they show any inclination to talk about the rulers in detail. They perceive these royal tombs as evidence of Patani's past status as an independent kingdom even though they acknowledge its status as a tributary state subservient to Siam. Their notion of the tributary relationship between Patani and Siam mirrors the published scholarly literature about premodern political structure in Southeast Asia in which political control emanating from the center of the tributary structure became weaker with distance. Polities that were located further away from the center were practically self-governing (Tambiah 1977; Wolters 1999). This notion of premodern Patani-Siamese political relations underlies the reactions that I often encounter when discussing the description of Sultan Ismail Shah as a governor, and not ruler or king of Patani, which is found on the information signboard located near his tomb. Khruu Ding, a retired history teacher whom I met in 2005, insisted that identifying Sultan Ismail Shah as a governor would imply that he was an official of the Thai kingdom when he was, in fact, a sovereign ruler. Sulaiman, a Patanian entrepreneur in his forties whom I have known since 2006 asserted that the information on the signboard reflected the Thai-centric view of history. During our visit to the grave in February 2017, Sulaiman, whom I should point out, has not received any higher education in history, said, "This is what is taught in the history syllabus in public schools in this country. The Siamese country [PM: *negri Siye*] was larger than what it is today. It had to give away land to the Europeans to avoid being colonized." His statement remarkably mirrors Thongchai Winichakul's (1997) seminal work *Siam Mapped*. Thongchai argues that the intrigues of the historical mapping of Siamese territory show that Siam had, in fact, colonized much of the land of neighboring kingdoms rather than suffered the loss of its land to the French and British as purported by Thailand's official historical narrative. For Ismail, Khruu Ding, and Sulaiman, it is important to recognize Sultan Ismail Shah's position as an independent ruler because it legitimizes Patani's identity as an Islamic Malay kingdom.

With an accumulated fatality exceeding 6,000 since the re-emergence of political violence in 2004, the significance of the conflict in the Deep South can hardly be overstated. This conflict, however, has as much to do with the past as it does with the present. Thai historian Thanet Aphornsuvan (2007) has argued that the conflict between the Thai state and its Patanian citizens

is rooted in their differing notions of history, especially in terms of the relations between Patani and the Siamese kingdoms. To the Patanians, Patani was a sovereign political community. To the Thais, it was a part of Siam. The Patanians' political struggle against the Thai state is viewed in the latter's official historiography as secessionism. It is a separatist movement without legitimate historical basis. This point is exemplified by Chaiwat (2006) who has observed that the Patanians often refer to their clashes with the Thai state as wars (PM: *peghae*) while the Thai state has been inclined to view these incidents as rebellions (Th: *kabot*). My discussion of Masjid Krisek and Sultan Ismail Shah's tomb shows that historic places embody the troubled relationship between the Patanians and the Thai state. Place-making in terms of conceptualizing these two historic sites as symbols of Malay-Muslim Patani is central, at least, to non-violent Patanian resistance against the Thai state. We turn now to Ban Haji Sulong to witness what one might view as a *Patanian place* in the making.

### **Ban Haji Sulong**

Ban Haji Sulong is the former residence of the late Haji Sulong b. Abdul Kadir Tokmeena. A prominent member of the Patanian religious elite, he disappeared after reporting to a police station in Songkhla on 13 August 1954 (Ockey 2011). He is possibly the most frequently mentioned individual in both scholarly and popular discussions about Patanian political history. Consequently, we may view Haji Sulong as a public figure. Whether his former residence should be considered a Patanian place, however, is a separate matter. The house had been left to deteriorate and did not appear to attract much interest from the Patanian community until recently. This situation has changed considerably since 2014 when it first became the venue for the annual commemoration of his disappearance. The Patanians believe that he was the victim of extrajudicial killing by officers of the Thai state.

Haji Sulong was born in Pattani in 1895. As a male member of a lineage of Islamic religious teachers and scholars, Haji Sulong was primed to follow in his ancestors' footsteps. His grandfather, Syekh Zainal Abidin b. Ahmad al-Fatani, was among the most prominent Patanian scholars of his generation (Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani 2009). Haji Sulong received early religious instruction at a traditional Islamic school in Krisek before he was sent to Mecca for further learning at the tender age of twelve. In this way, Haji Sulong followed a life path that had been established

by scholars of Patani and the Indonesian-Malay world for centuries. Many of the prominent scholars from the region had either sojourned or migrated to the Islamic spiritual heartland (Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani 2009; Azyumardi Azra 2004; Bradley 2015; Feener 2015).

In Mecca, Haji Sulong studied briefly under the tutelage of Tok Kenali, a prominent Kelantanese scholar and student of the preeminent Patanian scholar Syeikh Wan Ahmad b. Muhammad Zain al-Fatani. He then learned from various teachers in the Hejaz region following Tok Kenali's departure for Kelantan. Like some of his predecessors from Patani, Haji Sulong gained much knowledge to be able to conduct classes at the al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. Additionally, he encountered firsthand the political changes in Mecca that was brought about by Sharif Hussein's revolt against the Ottomans and the subsequent invasion of the holy city by King 'Abd al-Aziz al-Saud. These events coupled with the modernist fervor of the influential rector of Al-Azhar school in Cairo, and the Wahabism of Mecca's new rulers made a lasting impression on Haji Sulong's religious and political views. These would influence his activities upon his return to the land of his birth.

The Patanians today remember Haji Sulong for his involvement in religious and political activities in the Deep South. Put another way, he successfully blended these two roles so that the two mutually reinforced one another. For example, he was able to gain the support of Thailand's new political elites who came to power in the 1932 revolution, which saw the nation transform from an absolute to constitutional monarchy. The founding of his school, Madrasah al-Ma'arif al-Wataniyah Fatani, was partially funded by the Thai government. The school's opening ceremony was attended by then-Prime Minister Phraya Phahon. The initial promise of Haji Sulong's relationship with the political elites of Bangkok, however, was crushed not long after that when the government ordered the closure of his school, which was suspected of becoming a center of political activities in 1935 (Ockey, 2011).

James Ockey (2011) notes that Haji Sulong showed willingness to work within Thailand's new political system. In the first parliamentary elections of 1937, he supported a Buddhist candidate Jaroen Suebsaeng at the risk of a backlash from the Patanians. Haji Sulong's participation in politics, however, became complicated when Field Marshall Phisun Songkhram

became the prime minister in 1938. The implementation of the latter's assimilationist policies nationwide which promoted the Thai-Buddhist cultural nexus generated much dissatisfaction among the Patanians. They saw Phibun's policies as an infringement of their Malay-Muslim identity and way of life. Many elderly Patanians today view the reign of Phibun with much distaste. In 1947, Haji Sulong led the submission of a seven-point petition to the government that sought to elevate and protect the rights of the Malay-Muslims in the Deep South. The government was slow to respond to the petition. Haji Sulong, however, was relentless in his pursuit. Owing to the political turmoil at the national level and personal differences among the Patanian elites, Haji Sulong was eventually arrested in 1948 and convicted the following year.<sup>3</sup> He was released in 1952 but was closely monitored by provincial authorities. Subsequently, he and some of his close associates were ordered to report to the police in Songkhla in 1954. They complied on 13 August 1954 and have never been spotted after that. Many Patanians believed that they were killed by the police.

The circumstances of Haji Sulong's disappearance contributed to his legendary status among the Patanians. Even today, many Patanians consider him to be an icon of the Thai state's victimization of their community. According to several of my Patanian interlocutors, people who had close connections to Haji Sulong were terrorized by the security personnel that were assigned to the Deep South. Some members of Haji Sulong's extended family even resorted to changing their family names to avoid harassment and suspicion by officers of the state.

Ironically, the situation has changed gradually since the resurfacing of the conflict in the Deep South in 2004. Today, the space for discussing the political situation in the Deep South in terms of the Patanians' troubled relationship with the Thai state is more open than it has been in previous decades. This is true even after the coup in June 2014 that saw the country revert to military rule, although many people exercise more care when commenting on the political situation

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<sup>3</sup> A detailed account of the various political developments and Haji Sulong's activities need not be included in this essay. For further reading, see: (Ockey 2011).



in the last three years than they had to in the decade prior to that. It is against this political backdrop that we see the return of Haji Sulong's former residence to public attention.

In August 2014, Haji Sulong's family convened an event to commemorate his life and contributions to Patanian society. This inaugural event was attended mostly by relatives and some civil-society activists and scholars. The event's success gave confidence to those present to organize a larger-scale follow-up event a year later, which I attended. Having grown accustomed to the sensitiveness of discussing the Haji Sulong issue since I began conducting field research in the Deep South in 2002, I was quite surprised by the scale of the event, which included an art exhibition, poetry recital, and a panel discussion. The gathering was attended by some 400 people, including members of the civil society in the Deep South, civil servants, and some members of the international community (Hadee Hamidong & Julian Juarez, 2015). Chaen Suebsaeng, the son of Jaroen Seubsang whom Haji Sulong endorsed in the first parliamentary elections in Pattani, participated in the panel discussion about the Patanian community's political grievances rather openly.

Aside from allowing the annual commemoration of Haji Sulong's to continue, the government has also shown some willingness to explore the possibility of reconciling with the Patanian community by investing some 7.7 million baht to repair Ban Haji Sulong (Sinaran News Online 2017). Based on the plan, the restored building will house an information center to educate visitors about the history and society of the Deep South. Work began in March 2014 and had been completed by the third annual commemoration of Haji Sulong's life in 2016.

"We are waiting to see what the family decides to do," said 30-something year old Abbas during our conversation in December 2016. An active member of the civil society in the Deep South, Abbas has supported the annual event at Ban Haji Sulong from the beginning. According to him, some members of Haji Sulong's family remain undecided about whether to hand over the management of the building to a non-member of the family. In an interview with *Deep South Watch* (Sinaran News Online 2017), a civil-society network, which publishes news and data about the Deep South online, Chaturon Iamsopha, a grandson of Haji Sulong, said that the main reason for the family's reluctance is that there are members of the family who continue to live within the

compound. He iterated this point to me during my visit there in July 2015. Abbas, however, has an alternative view:

Ayoh Long's family wants to redeem his good name and the name of the family. We understand this, and we support it too. However, do remember that this is a political family. You already know about Ayoh Den's political career.<sup>4</sup> So, some questions remain: Will the information center highlight the situation of all Patanians? Or, will it be used for the prestige of his family?

Abbas referred to Haji Sulong as Ayoh Long. "Ayoh" is the Patanian Malay word for "father." When applied to an older man who is not the speaker's father, this word functions both as an honorific and a term of endearment. I observe that some members of the Patanian civil society have begun to refer to Haji Sulong as Ayoh Long since the commemorative gathering in 2014. More importantly, their use of this term indexes their ideas about what kind of place Ban Haji Sulong should be. Abbas and several people with whom I have discussed the issue have expressed their desire for Ban Haji Sulong to become a public place, a Patanian place as it were. Ahmad, another active member of the civil society in the Deep South, told me:

I don't think anyone thinks that ownership of the space should be given to the public. However, the information center should be managed by a professional curator. I don't think anyone in Ayoh Long's family is qualified to do this. If they are sincere about contributing to efforts to make outsiders better understand the Patanian society than they should let someone else manage the information center. Otherwise, I don't think that I want to support to future events.

Abbas, who has not discussed the issue with Ahmad, holds a similar position. He, too, says that he is less likely to support future events if he thinks that Haji Sulong's family is more interested in furthering their political ambitions through the information center. He adds:

My friends and I think that Haji Sulong should be portrayed as an ordinary person [PM: *oghe biaso*]. What I mean is that there are others who have fought for the rights of the Patanians. Ayoh Long is just one of them, although I acknowledge that he is better known than the others, partly because he was killed by the state [Th. *rattaban*]. There are others who are less known, but their efforts are important too!

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<sup>4</sup> One of Haji Sulong's sons, Den Tokmeena, is a retired politician who has held positions as deputy minister in the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Interior.

So, I think that the information center should reflect all Patanian efforts and desire for others to understand us better and not just Haji Sulong or the Tokmeena family.

The case of the restoration of Ban Haji Sulong with its ongoing uncertainty over the management of the planned information center is interesting, especially when juxtaposed with Masjid Krisek and Sultan Ismail's tomb. While they have supported the initial efforts to rehabilitate Ban Haji Sulong, both Abbas and Ahmad are waiting to see the family's next move before deciding whether they will continue to support the project. Their shared position is consistent with the attitude of many Patanians regarding historic sites in the Deep South. Their interest in such sites is grounded in the perception that these places are significant to the Patanians' shared identity and history. While Abbas and Ahmad recognize and appreciate Haji Sulong's role in Patanian political history, they are adamant that the restored Ban Haji Sulong should advance the whole community's effort to be understood rather than merely commemorate the respected late public figure or his family's interest.

### **Patani, landscape, and place-making in the Deep South**

According to Gieryn (2000: 465), "whether built or just come upon, artificial or natural, streets and doors or rocks and trees, place is stuff." In this way, he echoes Cosgrove (2006) whose assertion about the unquestionable material existence of landscapes I referred to earlier in this essay. Likewise, Yi-Fu Tuan (2013: 6) has suggested that landscape is simultaneously a "construct of the mind as well as a physical and measurable entity." While a place's meaning is central to its constitution, the importance of its material existence should not be discounted. In my conversations about historic places in Thailand's Deep South, many Patanians have expressed their appreciation for the physical presence of such sites.

Nadia, a young Patanian woman whom I interviewed in May 2015 claimed that Thai-Buddhist professors at her university would occasionally reproach the Muslim students by asking for proof of the veracity of the collective memories that circulate among the Patanians. According to her, she and her professors could disagree on the meanings and stories behind these historic places but not on the existence or occurrence of the persons and events associated with them. These historic places gave Nadia the confidence to stand firm even when her world view is challenged by someone who is socially superior.

One night during a vacation in the Deep South in December 2016, I took the opportunity to discuss the issue with Ali, a forty-something year-old filmmaker from Narathiwat, after my family members had gone to sleep. When I asked for the reasons why he thought that historic places are important to the Patanians, Ali simply said, “So that we do not forget the past.” I decided to push ahead by asking, “What would be lost if the Patanians forget the past or if these historic places do not exist?” Melancholy, then, seeped into the atmosphere of our conversation, which included two other men. With tears building up at his bottom lids, Ali said:

If these historic places do not exist, it is as if we [the Patanians] do not exist. Truthfully speaking, our community still remembers many events that happened in the past, including those for which there is no site of memory [PM: *tempat peringattae*]. Nevertheless, those places that exist, they are an important part of who we are. At the very least, we can point to them whenever someone doubts the stories that we tell about the Patani nation’s past.

The two other men who were also present nodded their heads slowly in agreement with Ali. This was neither the first, nor the last time that Patanians have highlighted the connection between the existence of historic sites and their community in our conversations.

Meaning-making is central to the process of place-making. Let us now recall Cosgrove’s (2006: 50) point about landscapes coming “into being only at the moment of apprehension by an external observer.” There are two implications of the statement to be raised here. Firstly, landscapes are made and may be constantly remade. Secondly, landscapes are conceptual and that they are constructed based on the observer’s view about what they signify. While an observer may make his own interpretation about the meanings of places, it is crucial to acknowledge that the collective memories of his community and the social environment often influence this process.

The three historic places discussed in this essay highlight this point. In their treatment of Masjid Krisek, Makam Sultan Ismail Shah, and Ban Haji Sulong as Patanian places, the various individuals we have encountered in this essay hark back to an idealized notion of the past. The Patanians’ perception about their collective marginalization in contemporary Thai society is pivotal to their romanticizing of the social conditions in Patanian society prior to its invasion by Siam. By emphasizing the “Patanian-ness” of these places, my interlocutors appear to be longing

for something which they felt has been lost. When asked about this matter, an introspective Ismail said:

When we search deeply into the past, we may never know what we will find. What if we find out that the common people like us were suffering under the rajas? I know that no society is perfect, no ruler is perfect. Would “Patani” lose its importance? I can accept that Patani was not perfect, but I still believe in its importance. It helps us remember who we are. When you watch the news on television these days, you would see that we are portrayed as troublemakers. We are like rubbish, useless to society. Patani reminds us of our worth. There are many good things here. There are many good people, many talents. We are just slightly different from the Thais, our culture, our language, our religion. Of course, there are bad people here. But there are also bad people in other parts of the country and everywhere else.

Ismail’s emotional response reveals a desire to be accepted and appreciated by Thai society. To him, his community’s cultural difference from the rest of society should not be viewed with disdain or even as a threat. During our conversation, Ismail would go on to stress the importance of separating his community’s remembrance of Patani from the desire for independence from Thailand. He asserts that the latter is not an inevitable consequence of the former. Rather, Patani as an idea registers the contemporary community’s desire for recognition and respect as legitimate and equal members of society, even if they insist on a cultural identity that is different from the rest of Thai society. My interlocutors express the view that Patanian historic places embody their community’s favorable past which they can be proud of compared to the present. It is the loss of this romanticized historical situation that the Patanians grieve.

## **Conclusion**

Place is central to the ways people understand their existence in society and the world. Place is fundamental to the human condition. The philosopher Edward Casey (2001) has argued that to exist is to be emplaced. The reverse is also true. Place, distinguished from space, do not exist without people. In other words, people make place and place make people. The two are mutually constitutive. As members of societies, an individual’s perception of place is shaped by others. In this paper, I have discussed the Patanians’ view and treatment of historic places in the Deep South as constituents of a landscape of grief. I have argued that a shared perception of their community’s

marginal position in Thai society shapes the way that Patanians conceptualize the significance of the historic sites in the Deep South. The importance that they attach to these places, despite their lack of detailed awareness of the sites' histories, reveals their longing for social acceptance and respect.

In March 2017, I met my friend Noppadon with his colleague, Ibrahim, in Bangkok. Noppadon is a Thai-Buddhist from the northeastern province of Mukdahan who had graduated from the Prince of Songkla University (Pattani Campus). He was Ibrahim's only friend at the ministry where they worked. Noppadon was surprised at how verbose his junior colleague had been during our conversation at dinner. Ibrahim, however, had to leave early. After he left, our conversation turned to the current essay, which I had, at that time, just presented at the Southeast Asian Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) workshop at Chulalongkorn University. Noppadon remarked that the topic was particularly relevant to Ibrahim's experience at their workplace. According to him, Ibrahim had been somewhat shunned by their colleagues owing to his identity as a Patanian and his religious beliefs and practices. For example, Ibrahim who hails from Yala used to perform his daily obligatory prayers at a remote corner of the office. However, he stopped doing that upon learning that some of his colleagues had been uncomfortable with it. Additionally, Noppadon, claims that some of his colleagues were even uncomfortable with him shaking Ibrahim's hands every morning in the usual way of greetings that many Muslims in Thailand observe when they meet. Consequently, Noppadon says that there is still much ignorance about the Patanian way of life among the Thais.

History is central to the political troubles of the Deep South. The differences in the attitudes of the Thais and the Patanians regarding the latter's insistence in seeking recognition and regard for their unique Malay-Muslim cultural identity is grounded in their disagreement about the Patanians' historical political status in the context of Siam's tributary structure. However, things have been changing even though a permanent peaceful resolution might still appear elusive. The space for political discussions has been widening in recent decades even though progress is delayed from time to time, given Thailand's ongoing political volatility. Nevertheless, there are reasons to persist in encouraging the diversity and exchange of views about the past. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian's (2013: 254) observation is instructive in this regard:

Never before have contradicting versions of history been allowed to coexist and challenge the history of the victors. That the different narratives are now allowed to compete for public attention virtually on the same platform can be seen as a positive development in history-writing in Thailand. One might even go further in Patani's case and claim that the contradicting histories of Patani have been the main reason for the emergence of an historically more balanced and proven factual analysis of the story of the Thai Malay Muslims in Patani, as clearly displayed since the 1980s.

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